



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1416
Ein cyf/Our ref LW/00545/24

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions Committee

petitions@senedd.wales

29 April 2024

Dear Jack,

Petition P-06-1416 Increase Speed Limit on M4 back to 70mph

Thank you for your letter of 18 March, addressed to the previous Deputy Minister for Climate Change, providing details of *Petition P-06-1416 – Increase the speed limit on the M4 back to 70mph* as provided to the Petitions Committee by Jonathan Jones. Your letter asks me to provide views on the issues raised in the accompanying Petition Text.

Welsh Government has a legal duty to comply with statutory air pollutant limits for the protection of human health. Outdoor air pollution is considered to be the largest environmental health risk of our generation, according to the World Health Organisation, increasing risks of heart and lung disease as well as contributing towards the worsening of pre-existing health conditions such as asthma. These pollutants include nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), particulate matter (PM_{2.5}/PM₁₀), ground level o-zone (O₃), sulphur dioxide (SO₂), and carbon monoxide (CO).

Vehicle emissions are a major cause of NO₂ levels near roads. [UK compliance assessment](#) identified NO₂ levels above the legal limit at several locations on the Welsh Government motorway and trunk road network. These locations included the M4 at Newport between junctions 25-26, Port Talbot between junctions 41- 42 and also the A470 between Upper Boat and Pontypridd.

Accordingly, to comply with the above limits, a reduced 50mph speed limit has been applied at each of these locations to reduce emissions of NO₂. The 50mph speed limit is mandatory for all motor vehicles, with road signs in place to inform motorists that the speed limits have been applied for air quality purposes. The reduced speed limit is based on research which indicated emissions were lowest for light duty vehicles at speeds up to 50mph, whilst heavy duty vehicles did not show an increase at speeds above this level.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Huw.Irranca-Davies@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Huw.Irranca-Davies@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Our evidence revealed the 50mph speed limits to be the quickest and most effective way to reduce NO₂ levels to improve air quality for our communities. However, we understand that reduced speed limits are not always welcomed, particularly where motorists are not clear on the purpose. This is why we have taken steps to raise awareness of the reason for this action, including through fixed and variable road sign messaging, an educational video, and further information on the Welsh Government website including Frequently Asked Questions. More detailed information on the initial option appraisal of potential measures to support compliance with statutory limits is also publicly available in our [Stage 1 and 2](#) Welsh Government Transport Appraisal Guidance (WelTAG) reports, and in our [Stage 3](#) reports which made the case for the 50mph speed limit.

We continually measure air quality at each location where we have introduced 50mph speed limits for air quality purposes, and we have published this data in reports for the [2018 and 2019](#) calendar years, and the [2020 and 2021](#) calendar years. This data has revealed significant reductions in NO₂ pollution levels at these locations. We will shortly be releasing a report detailing measurements for the 2022 and 2023 calendar years.

Further information regarding our actions to tackle high NO₂ concentrations on the motorway and trunk road network can be found here within our [Welsh Government supplemental plan to the UK plan for tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations](#). Also, Welsh Government actions to improve air quality more widely can be found in our [Clean Air Plan for Wales: Healthy Air, Healthy Wales](#).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Huw Irranca-Davies', written in a cursive style.

Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig
Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change & Rural Affairs